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Title:

A message to Tommy

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A Message to Tommy.

There are few delights like the half-opened window of a pantry. Specially over those swing windows which pivot in the middle - they make it harder to get in that way. It is not the window that really matters, you understand, but its being there. It is not the thought of what may be inside - lemon cheese and strawberry preserve, or perhaps instead just a lot of old junk - grandpa's top hat, and a mouse-hole, and whatnot, but the possibility of squeezing through and finding what is inside from a new angle, even though you may ~~really~~ ^{at all} know from the beginning ~~all that is there~~.

That's ^{what} Tommy thought, at any rate. (I don't know whether his real name was Tommy, or not, but he certainly looked as if it was.) Though on second thoughts perhaps he may not have thought it; but I ~~am sure~~ ^{am sure} he felt that way, though of course Tommy ~~definitely~~ ^{definitely} would not have put it into those words, for he either could do so, nor would he understand or be in any way interested in the process, simple as it is.

All the same, you must realise that Tommy was no common mortal. No children of his age are, unless they are extraordinarily precocious. There are people who say they love the common man. What miserable fools they must be! I cannot think of any object which moves me to contempt and irritation more than the common man. No common man, knowing that he could squeeze himself through that pantry window, would, however, yield under any circumstances to the temptation. In all probability he would not even feel it, for all that innate human drives and impulses are, in such a person, stifled, thwarted, toned, so to speak in the garbage can, and the result is that the individual only performs such functions as he believes are purely rational and so acts in that peculiarly objectionable manner that the common man always does. Not that he does not act upon ^{impulses} ~~impulses~~ that are not always purely rational. In fact he ~~assumes that all his~~ ~~actions are logical and so are all his~~ ~~and commits~~ ~~betrayal~~ ~~distresses~~ sends his children to Sunday School by main force, and never looks inside a church himself, loses his money at the races ~~and vents his~~ ~~amusement on others~~, ~~assets of his mindness as much as any~~, and gets drunk with gay abandon. But these actions, you see, conform to a set of rules of conduct which seem to him to be quite rational, and he would be amazed at and angered by anyone who ventured to raise the question of whether they were or not. But Tommy, on the other hand, had not yet reached ~~these~~ the years of discretion, that is to say he had not yet become one of that obnoxious herd of creatures - the common men.

And so it was possible for Tommy to decide to climb in at the pantry window.

He had had a good breakfast - a very good breakfast - I feel instinctively it was pancakes, or perhaps an omelette, but ~~very~~ ^{probably} it was scrambled egg. A warm, beautiful glow of Saturday morning ~~and it was~~

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precaution and ecstasy, ~~rest~~ in the window. By the time the train drew up all that was to be seen of Tommy was a pair of brown trousers, bottoms up, and a small pair of legs waving to and fro.

The motor man got off to knock the clock, and the conductor got off too, presumably to give him moral support. This conductor contemplated for a moment with a surly frown the small brown seat which saved him.

"He," he said, "He, come out ~~or~~ there, now!" he growled.

There was a twinge of vexation which marred Tommy's happiness. His entering the pantry window was a private action - the whole thing had no possible connection whatsoever with anyone else, and his desire to do so and the excitement of doing so were personal and subjective. These feelings were crushed and diminished by this unwelcome outsider. No sensitive child receives with pleasure the rough intrusion of others upon ~~his~~ private joys. However, it was, as I have said, Saturday morning, and just to show there were really no hard feelings, Tommy eased himself out of the window ~~and~~ down onto the water meter, and turned to grin ~~angrily~~ at the conductor.

But his smile soon changed to a hurt frown, a look of utter ~~wilderness~~ ~~and~~ consternation - the ~~conductor~~ ^{man} was wholly in earnest.

"That's not the way to go in, now," he said, "Go in the door that's made for go in by, and I'll smack yer tail!"

He stepped up onto the train.

"Go ~~on~~!" he roared.

This was the worst of the species, the common man at his very lowest, and the little brown figure stood there, puzzled and upset, frowning, ~~with his mouth slightly open~~, a lump in his throat plainly working.

"Tommy, my friend," I said, "don't take any notice of that red-faced little ass with the big ears. You listen to me. You have every right to cling in that window if you want to. If any ~~fat~~ interfering busybody comes and intrudes himself upon you, calmly ignore him. He doesn't matter. None of the genus common man matters at all. And don't let him tell you it's foolish. He doesn't know. The pantry window is just as good a means of entering the pantry as the door, when you feel like it, in fact far better. Your inclinations are your own, and as long as you are not harming anyone else or the community as a whole, should be indulged. So go ahead and wriggle in the window. Life's too short to worry about the common man, you must get all the enjoyment out of it you can. There's a wonderful ~~man~~ ^{writer} called Darrow who says life's just an evasion of death. Baloney. Life is Tommy, and that is all. When death comes we make an end and there is nothing more. There is no such thing as "a state of death." Death is no state at all. When death comes we just overit, Tommy, and life is what counts. So make your hay while the sun shines, and in order to do so, you must, even at your early

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age, learn to disregard as far as possible these ~~the~~ boorish flies-in-the-ointment. Don't be aggressive towards them, that's one of their traits. Merely be self-contained, and so long as you know it's right, do what you want to do before it's too late, ~~and say very loudly to them~~ "I didn't, of course, actually say this to Tommy."

I merely felt it towards him. I sent it out on a telepathic wave to Tommy in particular and the world in general, but all the same I knew that neither Tommy nor ~~the world~~ was turned in.

"Well," said the conductor, "where do you want to go?" Then I remembered - I had only ~~paid~~ ^{paid} to come this far. I restrained myself, and did not kick him, but ~~stepped~~ ^{stepped} off the train, waved to the little figure in brown, and walked home to write this message to you, that is to say, a message to Tommy.

to satisfaction permeated his whole being, ~~raised his heart~~, and gave to the pit of his stomach that cold, glad, feeling which is the very best of sensations. He went out and leaned over the thin-board fence at the side behind the house, and ~~alternately~~ ^{alternately} sawing his arms and kicked his legs, slowly, and with infinite pleasure, and watched with a half smile the people who got onto the train, which stopped just down there by the window, and the little girl across the road who held a basket and was ~~not~~ biting her nails, and waved to Miss Klein, who was, as usual, running for the train. The grocer's boy, with his big box on wheels driven by the back half of a push bike ^{trundled} ~~trundled~~ port, ~~the~~ leaning from side to side as he thrust his legs down. He grinned at Tommy, who grinned back, and said "~~That's~~ 'Bye day".

"~~That's~~!" said the grocer's boy, and on he went, and the people turned to look at the little boy, who as he turned to look back at them, spied the bottom half of the pantry window sticking out from the wall.

What better could one do on such a day and at such a time than to get down the side between the fence and the house and climb through the window to find out surely for oneself exactly what it is makes one do so? To see the bottles with their waxed tops, and others with cellophane across ~~the~~ ^{them} and elastic bands to keep it tight, (or perhaps to see the dusty cardboard boxes and piles of brown paper ~~and the old salt cotton~~ ^{and paper} ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~cracked~~ ^{cracked} ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~to see the little heaps of~~ ^{in the} ~~dust~~ ^{dust} in the corners and smell that intriguing, musty, smell that pantries take on when they're being used as junk rooms.) To see and to experience all this from the point of view of the pantry window - it must be done at once, not with haste, but slowly, deliberately with all the care and ^{enjoyable} ~~enjoyable~~ attention that befits Saturday morning.

Tommy stood straight, and jumped down from the fence, ^{inside} holding his body stiff as a board in doing so. When he hit the ground two feet below he gave a little "Yup." Then he walked along and squeezed himself against the corner of the house and that part of the fence, trying to fit himself into the space between. He tucked in the bulge where the scrambled egg probably was, made an effort, and was there. It was ~~hard~~ going at first, specially when he had to negotiate the uprights, ~~the fence~~ ^{the uprights, the fence} and the dirty brick and chalk mortar ^{watched his fingers} ~~until~~ ^{until} he was past the board fence and past the back of the big sign ~~which said "Star & Brothers"~~ ^{which said "Star & Brothers"} ~~Peter Davis and Minnie Hopkins in "Old Acquaintance"~~ and the fence became a moving one. The people waiting for the train watched him snugly ~~huddling~~ ^{shuffling} his feet in the pine dust and old train tickets which littered his path. Up too on the water metre box, then several attempts at a huge step up onto the top cross-rail of the fence, until finally successful, he turned and put his head in the pantry window. Then ~~he~~ ^{Tommy} began a series of drawings when stretching out and wriggling from side to side as ~~Tommy~~ ^{and} slowly, bit by bit, with infinite

precaution and ecstasy, went in the window. By the time the door drew up all that was to be seen of Tommy was a pair of brown trousers, bottoms up, and a small pair of legs waving to and fro.

The motor man got off to lunch the clock, and the conductor got off too, presumably to give him moral support. This conductor contemplated for a moment with a surly frown the small brown seat which saved him.

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But his smile soon changed to a hurt frown, a look of utter ~~consternation~~ ^{regret} and consternation - the ~~conductor~~ ^{man} was wholly in earnest.

"That's ~~not~~ the way to go in, now," he said, "go in the door that's made for goin' in by, and I'll smack yer tail!"

He stepped up onto the train.

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This was the most of the species, the common man at his very lowest, and the little brown figure stood there, puzzled and upset, frowning, ~~with his mouth slightly open~~, a hunk in his throat plainly working.

"Tommy, my friend," I said, "don't take any notice of that red-faced little ass with the big ears. You listen to me. You have every right to climb in that window if you want to. If any ~~fat~~ interfering busybody comes and intrudes himself upon you, calmly ignore him. He doesn't matter. None of the genus common man matters at all. And don't let him tell you it's foolish. He doesn't know. The panty window is just as good a means of entering the panty as the door, when you feel like it, in fact far better. Your inclinations are your own, and as long as you are not harming anyone else or the community as a whole, should be indulged. Go ahead and wriggle in the window. Life's too short to worry about the common man. You must get all the enjoyment out of it you can. There's a mounful ^{man} ~~man~~ called, Paragon who says life's just an evasion of death. Baloney. Life is Tommy, and that is all. When death comes we make an end and there is nothing more. There is no such thing as "a state of death." Death is no state at all. When death comes we just ~~overit~~ ^{over it}, Tommy, and life is what counts. To make your bag white the sun shines, and in order to do so, you must, even at your early

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Merely be self-contained, and so long as you know it's right, do what
you want to do before it's too late, ~~and saying many things at the time~~

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him. I sent it out on a telepathic wave to Tommy in particular
and the world in general, but all the time I knew that neither ~~Tommy~~ ^{he would}
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myself, and did not back him, but ^{stepped} ~~stepped~~ off the train, waved
to the little figure in brown, and walked home to write this
message to you, that is to say, a message to Tommy.

I don't really know whether his name was Tommy at all. It might have been anything from Jake to Aloysius. I once even came across a ~~very~~ ~~little~~ little boy - quite inoffensive and wholly undeserving of such an appendage - named Pacific Ocean Jones. As one who answers to almost anything within reason, since Tommy was the first name that came to my mind in relation to this particular youngster, I have ~~determined~~ ^{decided} on that name, and Tommy it shall be. ~~To meet Jake or a carpenter or Pacific Ocean under the guise of Tommy.~~

I had often seen him hanging over his back gate near the tram stop, his small face split wide with a grin and occasionally waving to a responsive passer-by. The gate was a board one, and obviously had those wide beams across it which allowed Tommy to stand on it, and ~~hang~~ lean on the top of the boards, letting them pass in front of him and under his armpits. He used to beat his feet on the boards and seemed quite extraordinarily pleased with the world - as if it were a huge and continual delight, bits of which were his own ^{entirely} and other bits were he, but shared with other people and those it was not his ~~it~~ but impinged upon him and added to his joy. The ~~goodness~~ ^{goodness} of it all. ~~It was easy to see that for him life was good, but of course he did not think about it.~~ Of course he didn't think about it - happiness, especially in children, is not a thing that is thought about - it just is. It was pretty obvious that happiness was

64 for Tommy.

Having seen him so often, I could quite easily imagine what had happened on this morning. Tommy had come out to the gate with a full stomach - it may have been flat yachos but probably it was scrambled egg - and climbed leisurely up to his favourite perch to lean over and gaze upon the world that was revealed over the gate, and plan what he would do with this Saturday morning.

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